United Nations E/CN.5/1998/2

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
17 December 1997

Original: English

Commission for Social Development
Thirty-sixth session
10-20 February 1998
Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development

Promoting social integration and participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. Introduction

1. As part of its regular review of the implementation and follow-up of the decisions taken by the World Summit for Social Development and in accordance with the multi-year programme of work of the Commission for Social Development and the agenda for its thirty-sixth session, as approved by the Economic and Social Council in its decision 1997/230, the Commission will consider in 1998 the priority theme "Promoting social integration and participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons", with the following subthemes: (a) "Promoting social integration through responsive government, full participation in society, non-discrimination, tolerance, equality and social justice"; (b) "Enhancing social protection, reducing vulnerability and enhancing employment opportunities for groups with specific needs"; and (c) "Violence, crime and the problem of illicit drugs and substance abuse as factors of social disintegration".[1]

2. In preparing for the thirty-sixth session of the Commission, the United Nations Secretariat organized two workshops in which independent experts from all regions participated to discuss how to expedite the implementation of the principal recommendations of the Summit as they related to the critical areas of promoting participation and enhancing social protection and reducing vulnerability. The outcomes of the discussions in the workshops have been taken into account in the preparation of the present report, which has been prepared to assist the Commission to formulate its own recommendations on implementation. The full texts of the respective workshop reports are contained in documents E/CN.5/1998/4 and E/CN.5/1998/5.

II. Participation and social justice

A. A society for all

3. The heads of State and Government at the World Summit for Social Development stated that the goal of social integration should be a society for all in which people have the right and the ability to participate in decisions affecting their lives. Such a society would be characterized by responsive government, non-discrimination, tolerance, respect for diversity, equality and social justice.

B. The importance of participation

4. Societies comprise diverse elements, and real or potential cleavages exist along many lines: income and wealth, social class, race and ethnicity, religion, language, gender, age and others. To maintain diversity while reducing divisions that can lead to brutal and violent confrontation is a continuing challenge. Ensuring the fair and effective representation and progress of all the diverse interests requires their fullest possible participation at all levels, from the micro level of the community to the macro level of the nation and beyond to the global level.

5. This requires investment in social institutions and social capital, enhancing social networks and relationships, building consensus, and generating individual, organizational and institutional capabilities within a supportive framework of global cooperation.

C. Promoting fuller participation

6. Participation can be understood as a means, a goal and a process. Participation is first of all an essential means to empower communities to identify their priorities and to ensure their control over the actions and resources needed to achieve their goals. It is pursued as a goal to instil self-confidence and self-esteem in individuals and communities when they have the assurance that their voice will count in decisions that affect them. As a process, participation offers a new approach to the governance of societies. Participation is about both gaining access to government and people being an important element in the process of governance.

7. With societies differing in many and important ways, there can be few universal prescriptions to further promoting fuller participation. There are, however, elements that are typically important and guideposts to follow in any society. The more important are listed below.

D. Political processes

8. A harmonious and equitable social integration requires the existence of both formal democratic systems and participatory institutions and mechanisms.

9. If elections are to be a true expression of popular opinion, they should be free and fair. The United Nations and other agents, both governmental and quasi-governmental, provide assistance to countries in organizing and monitoring elections; this assistance needs to be

reinforced and information about available help more widely disseminated. To eliminate barriers to the participation of minority or other excluded communities, access to information, funding and the media is essential.

10. Governmental decisions need to be made at the level most appropriate to the issue at hand, and in partnership with business and civil society organizations.

11. It is crucial to define the responsibilities of each tier of government: its functions, fiscal domain, other resources and powers of decision.

12. In addition to the national and local levels traditionally considered, attention needs to be given to the subnational level where new approaches to participatory democracy are emerging, for example in growing cities and their rural hinterland, in river basins or groupings of neighbourhoods in mega-cities. Community-based organizations, which are helping to meet immediate needs, such as housing, urban services or health care, learn to interact with other community organizations and to assume a mutual responsibility for producing solutions to their own problems. In the process, new practices and institutions are being created and the boundaries between politics, administration and civil society are being reshaped. These also provide new opportunities for interaction with national-level institutions, both public and private.

13. More information needs to be disseminated about such initiatives, as well as about successful examples of decentralization of resource allocation, service delivery and decision-making from the centre to the locality. Decentralization, however, is not always effective in promoting participation because it can simply involve further entrenching of local centres of power.

14. At the same time, decentralization must be accompanied by mechanisms for ensuring that basic rights and principles of social justice, as well as legal frameworks, are respected. For that purpose, transparency and monitoring mechanisms must be set up at all levels in order to ensure a proper balance between responsibility and autonomy among the different levels of government.

E. Space for civil society

15. A number of structures and mechanisms need to be constituted to enable civil society to make its full contribution to the promotion of people's various goals and the broader objective of a fully informed and involved citizenry. In order to consolidate and make democratic systems more participatory, it is essential to enhance grass-roots organizations, to further their integration with other organizations and to strengthen their involvement in more complex political processes, and to work with other actors, such as business, political parties and government agencies.

16. At the local level, civil society organizations should be encouraged to design, plan and monitor activities of benefit to the community. The participatory nature of grass-roots organizations themselves must be strengthened through promoting transparency and internal democracy, training and dissemination of information. Intermediate level organizations provide a link between local community organizations and the national level. National organizations can provide an opportunity for all to contribute to the planning, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes.

17. An important device is the institutionalization of the dialogue between people and their Government. For example, in some countries special councils, sometimes presided over by the Head of State or Government, have been established for that purpose, bringing together members nominated from civil society, the business community, the Government and other public institutions; as well as, in some cases representatives of regional and international organizations, including international non-governmental organizations.

18. The emergence of diverse local and national non-governmental organizations which involve citizens in community activities and in the practice of decision-making, conflict resolution and consensus-building should be welcomed. Governments can foster an enabling environment by assuring the right to establishment as well as non-interference in their activities, possibly embodied in legislation. Representative non-governmental organizations and democratically-elected Governments can work in partnership. The nature of that partnership should be one in which non-governmental organizations challenge Governments to be responsive to the interests of all.

19. Governments should provide resources for enhancing the capacity of non-governmental organizations to serve the community. Such funding should not adversely affect the autonomy of the organizations in their implicit role of complementing and supplementing government efforts to promote shared goals. Governments should welcome funding for local activities from bona fide recognized international non-governmental organizations, and should encourage the direct channelling of such funding to local activities.

20. The standing and credibility of non-governmental organizations would be further enhanced if their activities were fully transparent and open to review. Codes of conduct

developed by non-governmental organizations themselves and the adoption of the practice of open self-monitoring would be useful steps, particularly for international non-governmental organizations. With the rapid expansion in the scope and complexity of their activities, there is a need for greater coordination. A more explicit delineation of the mission of each organization and wide publicity would help to bring about an informal yet effective process of coordination.

F. Justice systems

21. Participation requires a guarantee of the rule of law and fair judicial procedures in order to reduce the likelihood of decisions that are arbitrary, corrupt and biased, which in turn requires a sound legal environment, including an independent judiciary with adequate resources.

22. It is important that the legal process be seen to be fair since it is typically the case that people are willing to accept as fair outcomes that they regard as unfavourable if the process through which the outcome was decided is regarded as fair.

23. Cases need to be expeditiously dealt with and at reasonable cost to the plaintiff. Legal aid or encouragement of pro bono work by lawyers would extend the range of those with access to the system. Non-governmental organizations and community organizations can also intervene on behalf of people without resources by means of public litigation. Court decisions also need to be enforced.

24. Laws should be written in language, to the extent possible, that is clear and understandable to everyone. Technical assistance may be appropriate for countries wishing to simplify their legal language and administrative instructions.

25. The existence of ombudsmen has proved to be effective in promoting people's awareness of their rights, in helping them overcome complexities of the judicial system and bureaucratic practices, and in correcting administrative injustices.

26. School and other educational institutions should include courses that give people a better understanding of their rights, the legal process and the opportunities available for redress of grievances.

27. Corruption is a denial of rights, undermines public institutions, hinders the just and equitable delivery of public services, obstructs economic efficiency, and acts as a barrier to participation and social integration.

28. The concept of corruption is culture-bound. It is a fact of life in many societies, although its modalities, prevalence and incidence vary, as does the degree of tolerance to it.

29. Action against corruption needs to be tailored to the specific type being combated. Corruption by low-level officials may by combated by raising their salaries, publicizing people's complaints, creating complaint mechanisms, publicizing the time stipulated for delivery of a service or dealing with a request, and ensuring that corruption is punished when exposed.

30. To deal with contract kickbacks and similar misdeeds, it is necessary to create effective evaluation and performance auditing systems, with the results made available to the public, and to make bidding and tendering more transparent and subject to public scrutiny. In the case of kickbacks and illegal commissions on large purchases across national frontiers, better information-sharing among countries on financial flows and asset transfers is necessary. To be fully effective, a multilateral approach is required, involving all banking centres, setting out disclosure and monitoring requirements.

G. Participation in economic decisions

31. All individuals have community, social and economic roles. Economic policies tend to be biased in favour of those with power and resources. As a consequence, policies are frequently designed that exclude significant sections of society. The challenge lies in identifying mechanisms and opportunities for enabling all people to participate in the process of designing economic policies.

32. Economic decisions are made at multiple levels. People can be economic actors and decision makers as consumers, producers and workers; members of families, households and communities; members of interest groups and organizations; tax payers; part of the formal political structure; or public servants.

33. Individuals can exercise influence by using consumer power; organizing into cooperatives and labour associations; through ownership of shares; or organizing in other ways to influence policy. This requires access to information, as well as a supportive legislative framework.

34. Within households and families, power relations often determine intra-household allocations. For example, men can control the income from women's productive activities, which may have a detrimental effect on household welfare and well-being. Methods need to be developed to assist people in working for more equal arrangements through such

actions as legal reform, literacy programmes or conflict resolution techniques. For example, a better understanding of gender analysis by policy makers and increased opportunities for women to earn an income are also necessary.

35. Social, religious and cultural networks can help to represent the specific economic interests of all the different groups in the community, particularly excluded groups; to ensure that policies reflect the needs and interest of communities; to ensure that policies do not lead to disintegration of communities; to collect relevant data and information on the impact of economic policies; to carry out participatory monitoring of policies; and to ensure local representation in government structures.

36. Single-interest groups can also have a strong impact on both the local and national economy (e.g., to facilitate certain activities, as well as to protest environmental, health and other concerns).

37. Participatory planning is appropriate at all levels of government, with local government particularly suitable for adopting participatory methods. Local government structures can enhance interaction between people and government; monitor environmental and social compliance by business organizations; ensure processes of accountability and open flows of information; influence the distribution of fiscal resources; and influence local economic development activities.

38. At the level of the central Government, there are a number of ways in which policy can be influenced, both from outside the Government, through think tanks, economic and social councils, alliances of academics, non-governmental organizations and pressure groups; and from within the Government, through parliaments and their committees, which can and do have an important role. In some countries, important national decisions affecting the economy are formulated on the basis of consensus achieved through an established consultative process, involving government, employers, trade unions and others.

39. For countries undergoing structural adjustment or reform, there is currently a broad consensus that civil society should be involved, that participatory assessment methods should be used, and that departments concerned with social questions, labour, health and others should participate with ministers of finance in negotiations with external donors on strategic policy issues.

40. Many economic policies are designed outside the countries concerned, often without adequate consultation. Capacity-building and training can help national authorities to increase their bargaining power in the process of dialogue concerning such policies.

41. Decisions on how and on what terms aid is used should be subject to agreement among all parties concerned in donor and recipient countries. In multilateral aid mechanisms, the views and concerns of the recipient countries, especially the poorer or weaker countries, need to be fully taken into account and respected.

42. At the global level, individuals, through their national affiliates of major international non-governmental organizations, can play an advocacy role in shaping policy on such issues as developing country debt or levels of aid budgets.

43. Regional and subregional economic groupings are assuming an important role in building capacity to promote development and bargaining for better terms in external transactions; they should be encouraged to involve civil society in their policy-making processes.

44. The concept of social responsibility by private enterprise needs to be explored and promoted, with the cooperation of the private sector, in order to encourage the replication of current best practices. A high standard of ethical conduct in international trade should be the aim of all participants.

H. Access to work, means of livelihood, income and social services

45. Involvement in economic activity and the resulting ability to earn or access sufficient resources for livelihood is an important component of social integration. Governments have a continuing and primary responsibility to secure for all who are able, effective, legal, economic participation in the society. For those unable to participate in such economic activity, Governments have a responsibility to secure for all legal residents a means of subsistence.

46. Many socially useful activities, such as child-rearing and caring for older persons or those with disabilities, are often not undertaken as paid employment. They are nevertheless important forms of participation in society. Therefore, while income-earning work may be the single most important means of social integration, unpaid but socially useful activities must be afforded equal status. One way to do this is to provide entitlement to social services and income maintenance on the basis of residency, not paid work. It is also possible to increase participation by bringing together groups with complementary needs. For example,

it might be possible to meet the needs of young parents for reliable child-care facilities by entrusting older persons (who are not necessarily related but community-based) to provide those services, thereby enabling their continued participation in and contribution to society.

47. Participation extends also to decisions about conditions of work at the plant, industry, country, and supranational levels. The tripartite forms of governance of employment policy established in many countries have increased cohesion and reduced conflict so long as they were genuinely inclusive of all kinds of workers, and need to be developed in ways that take account of the transnational nature of much economic activity. For example, the requirement placed upon transnational companies operating in Europe to consult with their workforce before deciding to move employment from one country to another could be emulated in other regions.

48. In the context of economic globalization and competition, it may also be necessary to reduce taxes on workers and to replace the revenue thus foregone that financed social services by other forms of taxation.

49. The provision by welfare states of social security, health care and education for all regardless of ability to pay was essential to secure social cohesion, social solidarity and safe societies. The essential purpose of that model — in contrast to the view that suggests that such welfare states cannot be afforded even in paired down form — could be emulated even as the form of provision and the agency of provision will differ. Welfare states are and should continue to be welfare mixes of state, non-governmental organization, private and informal provision, ideally always underpinned by the assumption that to include the better off in entitlement to state services is to secure the defence of those services by the most powerful. Targeted and residual services are recipes for social exclusion.

50. For social services to encourage the effective participation of all requires making them equally accessible and useful to members of all racial, ethnic and religious groups. The challenge is to provide equitably for diverse social needs in ways that are culturally sensitive. This can be facilitated by ensuring that the providers of services reflect the diversity of society; by monitoring with appropriate statistics and surveys the differential use of services by each group; and by ensuring that the form in which the service is provided matches the wishes of ethnic or other minorities.

I. Information, education, media

51. Information is a civic right and not a commodity, and capacities to produce and understand information are important resources for participation.

52. Governments and administrative institutions have to provide citizens and clients with comprehensive and understandable information about policies, laws, rules and procedures, available services and the rights of the population to have access to services of a certain quality. Indicators used to assess the provision of social services should be based on understandable and valid quantitative and qualitative criteria. Associations of clients and other non-governmental organizations must be involved in elaborating such criteria and in monitoring the delivery of social services.

53. It is not enough to provide people with information "from above". Disadvantaged groups of the population need access to communication channels in order to articulate their own needs, social experiences and judgements about public matters. Such groups can also be an important source of information for policy makers, especially when they complement expert knowledge with community-based, grass-roots sources of knowledge.

54. Non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations representing the poor, minorities and various disadvantaged groups can empower their members through training to take an active role in formulating policy priorities. Establishing channels for two-way communication between the political and administrative leadership and poor and powerless groups is an important mechanism for enhancing participation.

55. "Client's charters" prepared cooperatively by Governments, non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations are a valuable expression of the rights of clients, the duties and responsibilities of providers of social services, and the availability of social services to different groups of the population. Administration could be made more transparent by improving public access to official data and documents, including through channels provided by non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations and via the Internet.

56. Education is the most powerful way to break the vicious circle of poverty, powerlessness and exclusion. Although primary education is essential in order to promote participation and integration, all children should have access to quality education at all levels. The quality of teaching and the modern technological infrastructure of education,

including computers and access to the Internet, must be developed in schools, particularly in the poorest countries and neighbourhoods, with the help of government programmes, voluntary fund-raising and international assistance.

57. An educated citizenry is a precondition for fully effective democratic institutions. To facilitate participation and empower the weakest, civic education has a special role. Programmes for civic education should be developed in all schools and adult education courses. In secondary schools and courses for adults, project-based social learning could be used for developing participatory capacities.

58. With growing multi-ethnicity in many societies, the content of general education, starting from pre-school, should be designed to contribute to the openness, tolerance and intercultural communication skills of young people belonging both to majorities and minorities, and to promote solidarity and empathy among young people.

59. Social learning and professional retraining are needed by both young people and adults if they are to adjust to the social and economic changes going on in all countries. Life-long learning is not only a way to fight unemployment and exclusion, it is also essential for the integration of the generations.

60. New media, based on computers and global networks, create immense opportunities for a new dialogue between people and for uses of all kinds of information. But the new media are also creating new cleavages between countries and groups. Special efforts by Governments and assistance from international organizations is needed to bridge this new gap and to give people living in poverty opportunities for participation in the new information society. Schools, libraries and other public places in poor regions need to be equipped with computers and Internet access and turned into community communication centres.

61. The Internet creates a new space for public debate where people with similar needs can share experiences and ideas, and find support for participation in policy-building and social monitoring. The Internet could and should be used as a new resource for developing interregional and international links among socially disadvantaged people.

62. Mass media could be used more responsibly, recognizing that some types of information can be disempowering. Satellite television and the Internet, for example, can be used to advocate mass consumerism, and their content can be erosive and insensitive to local cultures and traditions.

63. Ultimately, responsibility in the media is best maintained by the demands of its audience. In order to create demand for a higher quality of information and develop capacity for critical use of mass media, media education should be included in school programmes and courses of adult education.

64. Information also includes various forms of public and private data and statistics. Statistics are usually collected on the basis of household surveys, with the result that individuals within households or individuals with no discernible home can be overlooked. Data collection can be manipulated and statistical information can be used to support any position. It is important for national statistical offices to maintain a high degree of autonomy to protect the objectivity of their work.

III. Enhancing social protection and reducing vulnerability

A. What is vulnerability?

65. Vulnerability is a part of the human condition. No one is without vulnerability, and even those who live in physical and material security live in fear of what might afflict them or those closest to them. There are degrees of vulnerability, and specific circumstances that need to be addressed.

66. In every society — regardless of geography, social structures, political and economic systems — people are exposed to a wide variety of risks, some of which may result from acts of nature while others are caused by human action.

67. Vulnerability is a state of high exposure to risks, combined with a reduced ability to defend oneself against those risks and to cope with the negative consequences that ensue. Risks in any society are not evenly distributed among the general population, hence people are not equally exposed. Certain individuals and groups have a much higher risk exposure than others because of socio-demographic characteristics, economic status, physical or mental condition, lifestyles and so forth.

68. Although vulnerability and disadvantage are terms often used as if they were interchangeable, they are distinct. Disadvantage attaches to all groups who encounter structural obstacles (i.e., obstacles created by society) to access to resources, benefits and opportunities. These obstacles derive from the relationships of power which exist in all societies and the relative value which society gives to each group. The effects for any one group may differ depending on the

societal context, but the result in all cases is increased vulnerability to poverty, oppression and exploitation.

69. They can also compound other vulnerabilities, where they exist. The structural causes that underlie disadvantage include race, ethnicity, gender, religion, indigenous or national origin, or socio-economic status. Although it is true that persons or groups who are vulnerable are also frequently disadvantaged and are often particularly vulnerable because they are disadvantaged, many can be vulnerable in the absence of any economic disadvantage. For example, prosperous immigrants, wealthy older persons and successful women, although not economically disadvantaged, could be vulnerable to various forms of victimization, discrimination or exploitation.

70. The degree of exposure to risks and the ability to cope with their negative consequences do not remain constant throughout the life span but vary from one stage of life to another. Also, types of risk can change according to situations and circumstances. Although it is difficult to define exactly what age limits separate one period of life from another, there are certain identifiable periods that bring particular risks.

71. Prenatal risks mainly result from the knowledge, situation and conditions of parents, in particular the health of mothers, their nutrition and the habits they follow during pregnancy.

72. At birth, human beings experience one of the most critical periods of life. Careful treatment of the mother and the child during this period is essential for preventing several disabilities. During the perinatal period, a nurturing environment is essential. Also, early screening and intervention can reduce risks or compensate deficient conditions, thus helping to prevent the onset of disease or disability. Infancy is an extremely critical period, when physical, emotional and cognitive developments are imprinted. Lack of stimulation, lack of affection, poor nutrition, abandonment, abuse or neglect are serious risk factors that can lead to stunted development and irreversible future disadvantage.

73. Children are prone to various internal and external sources of stress, with the age of three years being considered a particularly critical time in life. Children in different situations of risk may be distinguished, including children left in institutions or abandoned, or children fending for themselves in the streets. Often, they are born to families of lower socio-economic status; however, risks related to the physical and mental abuse of children and some kinds of abandonment or neglect can be found in families at all socio-economic levels.

74. Adolescence can be a turning point in life, when decisions and actions taken can have profound implications for the future. During this period of life risks include insecurity resulting from family disintegration; lack of sufficient frameworks for establishing self-identity or points of reference; lack of access to good health and education services; or self-imposed risks connected with experimentation with alcohol or drugs. Peer pressure and the need for acceptance may take on exaggerated importance and affect decisions regarding behaviour, as well as shaping intergenerational relationships. Unwanted pregnancy and prostitution are among other major risks to which this age group is exposed.

75. Many risks come with adulthood, as people prepare to form households and take on family and other responsibilities, including work. Difficulties in obtaining adequate housing and employment and family violence are common or prevalent risks.

76. Old age can bring significant risks, such as declining health, abandonment by the family, institutionalization, alienation and the loss of a meaningful social role. Even in countries where older persons have traditionally enjoyed great respect and influence, many people now face situations in which families do not have the housing and economic resources to take care of older persons.

B. Multiple risks

77. Combining any of these age-related vulnerabilities with other conditions, such as disability or membership of a minority group, results in an accumulation of risks, which can in turn lead to greater discrimination and segregation. The accumulation of risks has implications that go far beyond what policies aiming to counter any single vulnerability are designed to handle. Similarly, poverty or difficulties brought on by economic transition or adjustment, when combined with age-related vulnerabilities, can further magnify the risks that people confront because they reduce the options at their command, which may then compound their vulnerability.

78. Women and various social groups suffer structural disadvantages resulting from the nature of the societies in which they live, which have compounded vulnerabilities by hindering or denying them access to resources, benefits and opportunities, and have minimized their capacities to achieve sustainable livelihoods. Because gender-based roles and responsibilities continue to proscribe their choices in most places, women are particularly at risk and deserve particular attention. Other social groups that can be identified include

ethnic and religious minorities; indigenous people; refugees and displaced persons; migrants and migrant workers, both legal and illegal, as well as family members left behind; prisoners and ex-offenders; addicts and former addicts; squatters; street children; people living in extreme poverty; and landless rural workers.

79. In addition, people in vulnerable situations run a very high risk of becoming victims of various kinds of violence, both within and outside the family, affecting women, children, disabled persons, older persons and others.

80. Not only can individuals and groups be vulnerable but communities — and indeed countries — can be considered vulnerable as well. Those communities usually experience adverse structural conditions that create a high degree of vulnerability for their members. The economic difficulties faced by a community or a country may also be coupled with a low level of public resources and consequently low social transfers, which aggravate economic vulnerability. Economic vulnerability in a community is produced by a combination of factors.

81. Economic vulnerability at the community level may result in internal social and ethnic conflicts that can further reduce prospects for development. Generally, a low degree of community integration and cooperation makes an already negative condition worse. Economically vulnerable communities may be found in all countries, although they are more prevalent in developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

C. Why does it matter?

82. It is important to the well-being and cohesion of society to take measures to protect all its members from the risks they face at different stages in life and to overcome the disadvantages that they confront because of gender-based assumptions or by reason of their membership of a particular race, class or group.

83. When individuals are forced by circumstance to become a burden on their families and communities, the loss to society is obvious. When individuals cannot reach their full potential, it is not only they but also society which loses. Both individuals and society are strengthened when all people contribute to their maximum potential. But ultimately, any society must be judged by the place it accords to those in situations of greatest vulnerability and by the barriers it erects that prevent individuals and groups from participating fully in the life of the community. An analogous situation pertains at the global level.

D. Principles to guide policy

84. For the social well-being of citizens, priorities and policies are best designed and implemented to cover periods beyond the life of a particular Government or Administration and to focus on the long-term interest of the different groups in the community. Policies should aim to strengthen networks and organizations in the community, recognizing the essential support that they can provide. Organizations of civil society, especially at the community level, should be actively involved in the design and implementation of policies, as well as in their monitoring and evaluation. Recognizing interdependence is important, given particularly the interrelationship of three actors in society: the Government, the private sector and the civil society or voluntary sector.

85. As countries have sought or been driven to integrate more closely into the global market-based economy, various local or community-level developments have eased what has for many been a difficult and disruptive transition. With the realization that for many countries a successful integration into the global economy will take much longer than earlier believed, more attention is being given to adopting measures at the community level to produce acceptable living standards through non-market mechanisms. That means basically (a) improving the capacities of people to use their own labour and natural resources to produce directly for their own consumption a portion of the goods and services they need; (b) to build through community action the needed economic and social infrastructure, and to empower its members to avoid social conflicts and exploitation.

86. In this framework, development of the private sector is seen in a more diversified way: alongside the classic private employer, other arrangements could contribute to the economic development of communities, including self-employment, cooperatives and employee-owned firms. The so-called "third sector" is not only seen as something apart from the economy but also frequently serves as an important factor for economic regeneration.

87. In formulating policies, attention should be given not only to preparing individuals to cope with and function in society and to participate more fully in the social and economic development of the country but also to making the economic, social and physical environment friendlier for those with specific and special needs.

E. Reducing vulnerability through enhanced employment opportunities for groups and persons with specific needs

88. Reduction of vulnerability through enhanced employment opportunities requires both policy reform and direct targeted programmes. Direct interventions ensure effective outreach and implementation of policy decisions. While they can directly improve the worst manifestations of vulnerability, they can help to bring about necessary enhancement of the capabilities of the vulnerable groups. On the other hand, major policy and institutional reforms are often required in order to ensure that direct programmes achieve their objectives on a sufficiently large and meaningful scale.

89. For women, it is important to promote an overall environment of non-discrimination; to improve access to land and other assets, including financial resources and access to credit for business enterprises, in particular; to improve the human resource base; to expand access to wage employment by adapting working conditions to the needs of working mothers, including the adoption, at the national level, of legislation encouraging the establishment of return-to-work schemes and the adaptation of the job conditions to the needs of the family (job-sharing and flexible hours are steps in that direction); and to extend social protection and improve conditions of work in unregulated and unprotected jobs. It is also important to strengthen the organizing and negotiating capacities of women.

90. Young people commonly experience unemployment at a rate two to four times greater than the national average. One reason for the very high differentials is that new entrants to the labour force have greater difficulty locating jobs in their fields of competence than people already in the workforce.

91. In order to reduce the differential, it is necessary first to develop a job market, through public and private employment services and other means of informing young entrants to the labour force about available work opportunities. Second, there may be a need to adjust the educational system to the economic needs of the market to make the type of education provided relevant to existing demands for labour. Finally, policies and programmes should encourage youth to enter self-employment, exercise their entrepreneurial talents and create additional jobs which may be filled by other young people. Measures to encourage and sustain youth self-employment include management training, mentoring, credit facilities and the establishment of liberal laws and procedures conducive to the formation of small business enterprises.

92. For workers in the informal sector, it is important to create an enabling environment for a healthy growth of the sector. This entails conducive macro and sectoral policies, as well as a transparent and simple regulatory framework; provision of necessary infrastructure; improved access to credit, technology and markets; extension services geared towards improving product design and quality of goods produced; and support services for improved linkages with other sectors of the economy.

93. For people with disabilities, it is important to ensure respect for equal rights, the social and economic inclusion of people with disabilities, and the encouragement of a supportive social and physical environment, and to ensure the full participation of people with disabilities in education and training opportunities. However, the integration of the disabled in the work place cannot be accomplished simply by providing appropriate training for existing jobs unless this is accompanied by measures that make the workplace accessible and operational for the disabled, and by measures to show employers the advantages of hiring disabled workers.

94. Because of the degree of vulnerability that can result from disability, additional policies should be considered to encourage alternative work arrangements that reasonably accommodate the needs of people with disabilities, and that ensure that they are able to work according to their individual abilities. It is essential to ensure that laws do not discriminate against people with disabilities, to create conditions whereby neither an employer nor an employee with disabilities will suffer undue financial disadvantages from an employment contract, and to prepare policies that enlarge training possibilities in order to enhance their participation in employment.

95. Older persons often face discrimination in the workplace. It is important to ensure that older persons are considered for employment and advancement according to their capabilities, irrespective of age. The notion of a mandatory retirement age should be reviewed. And provision should be made for older workers to balance paid and voluntary work, while retaining rights to pension and social security, when available.

F. An enabling environment for reducing vulnerability

96. All countries can benefit from reformulating policies and programmes so that they recognize the existence and redress vulnerability in different social, economic and political relationships. Ultimately, such policies and programmes will not only reduce vulnerability but also promote social integration and bring about a more just society.

97. Accurate assessment of the nature and extent of vulnerability are preconditions for effective policy and programme interventions. Compiling the relevant information and making it easily available would contribute greatly to making people less vulnerable. It should be possible to create a "yellow pages" to list all the organizations working to support vulnerable people in one easy-to-use directory to help people to reduce their vulnerability at relatively low cost.

98. Promoting the establishment of democratic, transparent and accountable organizations at the community level, formulating policies that provide a framework for the work of non-governmental organizations, making resources available for non-governmental organization work without excessive control or regulation, and creating an environment in which cooperative and other types of people's organizations can flourish should all receive priority.

99. A function of umbrella organization in this context would be to promote the sharing of experience with regard to successful socio-economic projects, especially those that result in reduced vulnerability.

100. Countries may further reduce vulnerability by increasing awareness, participation and solidarity through various means.

101. One means is to simplify documents or provide simplified versions of constitutions, national development plans and other documents of relevance to ordinary people and translate them into local languages. Radio, television, documentaries and dramas can be used to that end, as can any of the new forms of electronic communication and information dissemination. Debates with wide public participation could be promoted in communities on various issues confronting or challenging the nation. Any measure that makes it easier for ordinary people to understand the link between participation (be it in the development debate, voting or other forms) and the betterment of their conditions deserves attention.

102. A main concern of legislation, criminal justice systems and social services is to reduce the incidence of violence against people and groups who are at risk or in vulnerable situations.

103. Laws, policies and practices that discriminate against particular groups or in any other way increase vulnerability need to be identified through consultation and research into the concerns and needs of those affected.

104. In developing and implementing policies, programmes and activities, respect should be accorded to indigenous knowledge, traditions and coping strategies. The development of culturally appropriate curricula, taking into account people's language, culture, seasonal movements and other factors, will help to reduce vulnerability in specific circumstances and promote social integration. International sources of funding could be directed to support locally created radio and television programmes that utilize and promote traditional cultural solutions to national problems. Communities should be guaranteed full access to their own community resources, and communities should be able to benefit directly from the resources they have traditionally relied upon without unnecessary restriction.

105. An enabling environment to reduce vulnerability needs to recognize and value spiritual aspects of development. Policies and programmes should not seek to improve material conditions alone but should also allow for spiritual development.

106. Borrowing from the gender and development approach, which focuses on meeting practical gender-ascribed needs in the immediate term while working to achieve strategic interests to transform unequal relations between women and men in the longer term, policies and programmes designed to reduce risk, vulnerability and disadvantage should adopt a two-pronged approach. It is important to recognize that many people at risk have immediate needs — often tied to survival — which must be met, even if by doing so their vulnerability is confirmed. Meeting practical needs of people at risk should not be the ultimate aim of policies and programmes, but the latter should always contain a component that seeks to remedy the conditions of disadvantage, discrimination, exploitation or exclusion which caused the vulnerability in the first place.

G. Increasing empathy

107. To reduce vulnerability will require more than programmes that seek to reduce risk. It is also important to increase social solidarity by creating opportunities that make

it easier for people to empathize with the situations of others and to respond positively to those situations. There are a number of ways in which people have erected obstacles that diminish the ability to feel empathy. None of these is inevitable, and policy initiatives to remove these obstacles are possible and would contribute significantly to diminishing the negative consequences of vulnerability.

108. An example is reluctance to express empathy for the "wrong" person or group, and fear of the unfamiliar or different: the suggested policy response is to provide information and opportunities for different groups to learn about others and to interact with them.

109. There are limits to the empathy that most people are prepared to demonstrate, particularly if they are called upon to make personal, financial or career sacrifices. The suggested policy response is to develop greater incentives for empathy, including tax incentives and allowing employees time off for voluntary activities, and to ensure that caring programmes recognize the efforts of the caregiver by meeting her or his legitimate expenses.

110. In most societies, gender stereotypes have resulted in situations whereby occupations associated with professional caring have been considered as female, resulting in undervaluation of their importance and remuneration. The suggested policy response is to promote greater reflection on the relative importance of socially useful work, to raise pay standards accordingly, and to encourage both young men and women to consider such career paths.

111. There is a tendency for institutions designed to care for individuals and groups at risk — and the people who work in them — to become bureaucratized, causing them to focus more on the needs and interests of the institution than on those of the people needing care. The suggested policy response is to introduce (where they do not already exist) regular periodic institutional audits to check that concern for the needs of the clients remains paramount. Such audits must involve representatives of those receiving care.

H. Mechanisms for partnership

112. It is important to encourage the establishment of mechanisms to facilitate partnership among Governments, the private sector and organizations of civil society specifically for the purpose of reducing vulnerability. Such mechanisms should provide a forum for all three sectors to come together to discuss relevant issues, each sector contributing in areas where it has a demonstrated advantage. Governments continue to have a major responsibility for the well-being of society and for setting national development goals. Organizations of civil society offer an opportunity for people to participate and to channel their efforts in an organized manner. The private sector should be encouraged to recognize that its responsibilities towards achieving a society for all go beyond activities motivated by profit, and its more active involvement in efforts to reduce vulnerability should be sought, particularly with respect to providing technical assistance, training, mentoring, information technology, credit and market information to assist micro-businesses.

113. Partnerships could also extend beyond national boundaries to include subregional and regional alliances designed to make the implementation and monitoring of policies and programmes more feasible, particularly at times when the causes of vulnerability or disadvantage are supranational in origin, or where combined efforts are needed to respond to global threats.

114. International support and encouragement for greater collaboration among Governments, the private sector and civil society, including non-governmental organizations, could have a significant impact in reducing vulnerability. Such support could be demonstrated by allowing increased participation by organizations of civil society in the activities and forums of international organizations.

115. Consideration should be given to establishing and promoting an international network of organizations, experts and individuals who have participated in different aspects of the process of the World Summit for Social Development and implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action in order to provide the Commission with a permanent but informal mechanism for the exchange of information and experiences to encourage involvement in the further implementation of strategic actions leading up to the special session of the General Assembly in the year 2000. Consideration should be given to the potential offered via the Internet.

I. Social impact assessments

116. To a large extent, policies and programmes seek to ameliorate consequences of vulnerability which have already come to pass. It would be better for Governments and for people at risk to prevent negative consequences before they occur and to replace palliative measures by positive initiatives. To do this, greater awareness of the causes and consequences of vulnerability is needed. One way to raise awareness is to undertake "social impact assessments" of legislation, policies and programmes before they take effect:

to examine draft legislation and other major policy initiatives at an early stage to predict and assess their impact — positive or negative — for women, various groups and people at risk. Those directly affected should be asked to participate in the evaluation, either directly or, if appropriate, through the intermediation of organizations of civil society with specialist knowledge.

117. Social impact assessments begin by gathering information about and providing analysis of current conditions for people exposed to different types of risk. This is important for two reasons: because in many places, analyses based on social considerations and outcomes are rarely made, and because an understanding of the current situation is a precondition for evaluating the impact of programme implementation.

118. The best social impact assessments include social and cultural analyses that permit an understanding of cultural dynamics and the translation of such understanding for use by decision makers. Parallel gender-based analyses should be applied to all policies. The systematic development within the United Nations of a methodology for undertaking social impact analyses is highly desirable.

J. Network poverty

119. Research suggests that there are situations in which vulnerable people need to connect with people in less vulnerable situations since it is the latter who often have the contacts and means to assist them. For instance, if the training and support of young people without jobs is carried out in a situation in which they simply relate to each other, then there is evidence to suggest that a culture of unemployment is reinforced, and that their chance of finding work is reduced, whereas if they are enabled to meet people with good contacts then there is a better chance that they will find employment. The concept of "network poverty" has been coined to describe a situation in which people with few prospects lack connections to people better situated.

120. Governments need to explore what practical policy initiatives they can take to ensure that the strength and dignity which disadvantaged people may find from linking with one another, and that the intimate knowledge of their challenges and their own effective coping strategies are matched by the practical help that may be available through wider networking.

K. Reducing vulnerability by promoting peace and the peaceful resolution of conflicts

121. Everyone who lives under conditions of conflict and war is vulnerable. To reduce vulnerability it is essential to reduce conflict and support mechanisms for the peaceful resolution of differences, both within and between countries. Important measures include informational programmes to promote greater understanding of peacekeeping issues, and the training of law enforcement and military personnel to prevent violence against people at risk and to promote respect for their rights. Community conflict resolution and counselling services are powerful and effective tools.

L. Reconsidering resource issues

122. Much of what is here proposed will be seen to have resource implications, but it would be easy to overestimate these. First, resources spent today may often lead to long-term savings. For instance, money spent on effective youth employment initiatives will increase national income and add to the ranks of taxpayers and hence tax revenue, not to mention the potential long-term savings if the likelihood that they would engage in socially disruptive or even criminal activity goes down. It is essential for States to develop accounting tools that enable them to evaluate rigorously and comprehensively social investment and dividends over a longer period of time than the traditional tax or accounting year. It is suggested that work be initiated to develop mechanisms for accounting that are appropriate for judging the actual return on social investment.

123. Second, expenditure under one heading may at times bring returns that more than compensate under another. For instance, it has been suggested that vulnerable families and young people in many cities would be much assisted if they were able to travel free-of-charge on public transport. That would clearly reduce revenue under one heading, but depending on the circumstances, the city economy would be likely to benefit from increased ease in the search for employment, more family visits to local shops, places of entertainment or education, and strengthened social contacts and thus integration.

124. Third, if recognition were formally given to unpaid work and socially-useful work (much of it done by women) and to voluntary activities (much of it undertaken through organizations of civil society), it would lead to better awareness and appreciation of those important activities and to a more accurate reflection of the distribution of work in

an economy. It would also create a more thorough understanding of how the need or the desire to meet social responsibilities can affect people's vulnerability and thus provide an invaluable tool to policy makers. Recognition would be more readily forthcoming if those kinds of work were properly recorded in national accounts. The relevant Secretariat entities need to consider how methodological work which is being undertaken to that end could be strengthened.

Notes

[1] In the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, recommendations relating to subtheme (a) are set out in paras. 71-74; to subtheme (b) in paras. 38-41 and 57-63; and to subtheme (c) in para. 79.